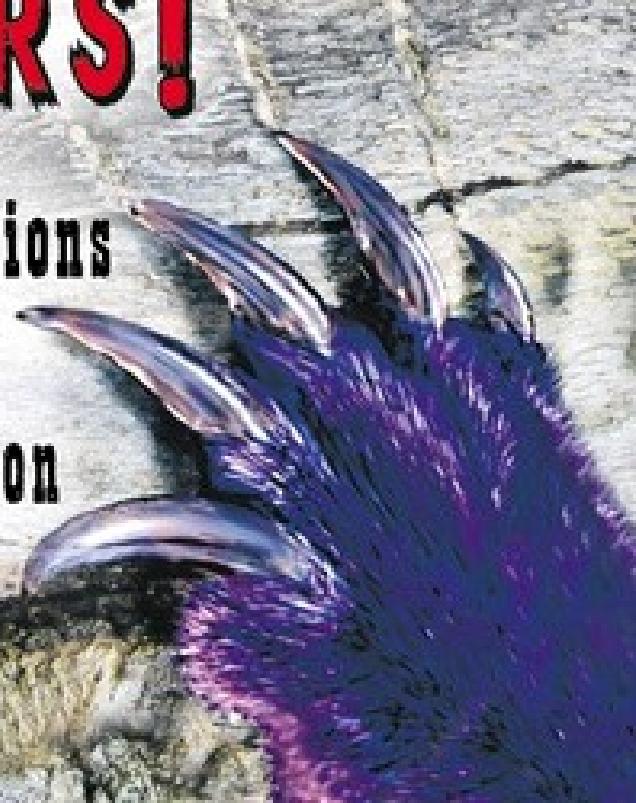


FEARSOME CRITTERS!

**Text and illustrations
by
Richard Svensson**



FEARSOME CRITTERS



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Foreword

Creatures that are unknown and mysterious, or even made up can prove to be just as vigorous as any animal known to science. One good example is the Loch Ness Monster, who pricks up its head again and makes new headlines as soon as it's been declared a bluff. Still, no conclusive evidence has ever been put forward which proves there really is a large unknown animal in the loch. There really is no need within this context. If there is no real animal, the monster will still live and thrive through us.

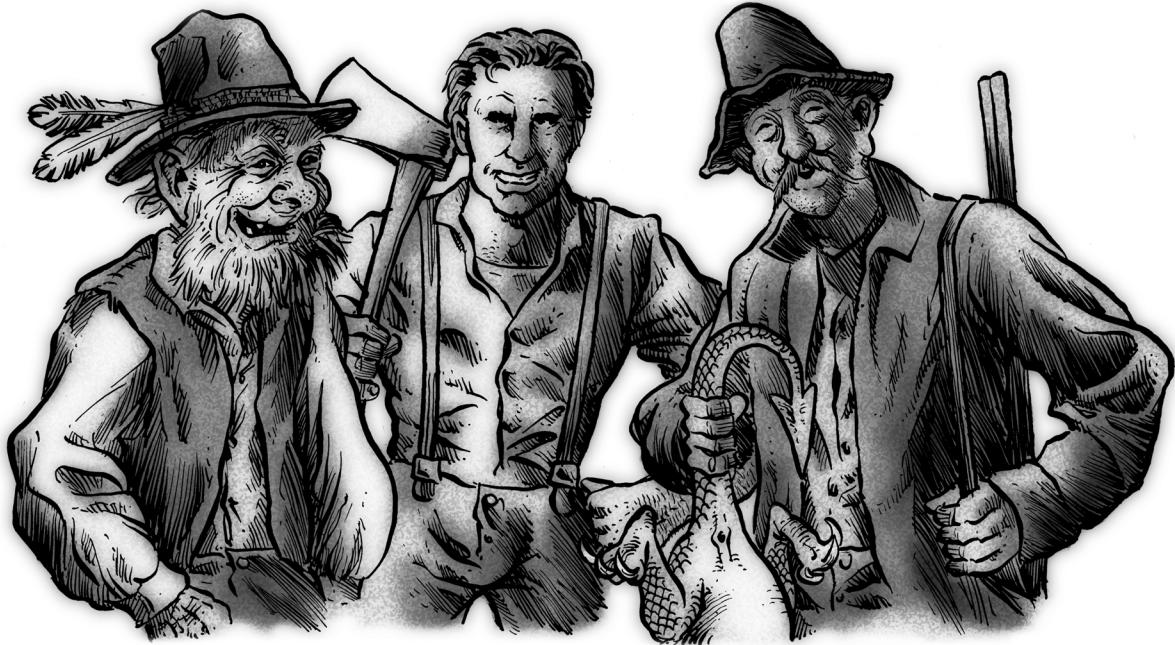
Not many of the beasts of legend have managed to bite into our latter day culture, but there are exceptions. Many of the mascots and symbols of rural communities have their precursors in the tales told around lumberjack campfires. These stories have in their turn grown out of a mix of European and Native American folklore, mixed with a genuine awe before nature and its elements. For the Native Americans, supernatural beings and beasts played important roles in the symbol-laden mythological world in which they lived in. To the white settlers these creatures quickly became amusing monsters let loose to add spice to a yarn.

The settlement community soon produced its own unique mythology, colored by the vast untamed land, which seemingly housed an unlimited number of wonders. The "Tall Tale" became an art form unto itself. To be able to tell a lie with flair was a male virtue. All who listened to the storyteller knew they were going to have their legs pulled, and that was the whole point, and the charm, of the listening. Many of these tales have become part of the American oral tradition, most notably the stories of giant he-man Paul Bunyan and his blue ox Babe. The likes of Paul Bunyan are to be found all over the globe. They are all local heroes who perform impossible feats of strength, slay monsters and leave marks on the land that tell of their exploits. Here and there in the U.S. you can find hollows in the ground where Paul Bunyan sat down to rest, and eroded mountainsides where Babe stopped to scratch an itch.

Other tall tales are perhaps less known, but no less cherished where they are told. The lumberjack community, which was predominately male, produced many stories about weird animals and beasts, "The Fearsome Critters", which served as evening entertainment around the campfire. These creatures were always linked to some well-known phenomena in nature, to which the aforementioned Fearsome Critter provided an explanation. Many of them were responsible for the many strange calls and noises heard at night.

Others left more prominent marks. I suppose one would assume that pine trees broken in half were victims of some autumn storm, but such was not the case at all. They had, in fact, been cracked by the *Splinter cat*, which head-butted them to pieces in order to find the ants and bees hiding within the tree trunk. When a lumberjack disappeared in

the woods many people would say that he simply got lost, but it's more likely he was caught and eaten by a *Hidebehind* or a *Jump-At-a Body*. If you were hit by a pine cone or a tree branch you could be certain you'd just been hit by a projectile launched by an *Agropelter* hiding in a rotten tree trunk. The list is endless. The wilds of the lumberjack era were the hunting ground for the *Gumberoo*, the *Lufferlang*, the *Squonk*, the *Hoof-Snake*, the *Wonk*, the *Goofus-bird*, the *Snallygaster*, the *Kickle-Snifter* and (probably) hundreds of others.



Some special characters are also recurring. The old poacher, trapper, etc., Mule McSneed often crossed paths with Fearsome Critters. He is one of the few who's managed to catch a *Squonk*. He also had the dubious pleasure of having a biting *Timmerdoodle* stuck to his rump for two months. Some critters were more popular than others. Storytellers stole from each other and inserted the creations of others into the tales of their own surroundings. The foremost literary accomplishment in the field (until this book, of course) is "*Fearsome Critters of the Lumberwoods, with a Few Desert and Mountain Beasts*" by William T. Cox. The book, published in 1910, is long out of print and quite the rarity.

Cox approached his subject with the appropriate tongue in cheek and even gave each animal a fitting scientific name in Latin.

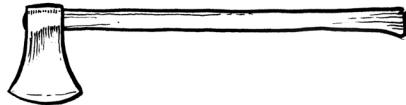
Some Fearsome Critters have survived until today in the shape of village symbols and college mascots. The stories of them and their curious natures are not as often told anymore, but still worth the telling. Let's have a closer look at what was said, and sworn by as the truth, around the campfires of yore.



The Splinter cat

This destructive beast has a very wide distribution and is said to be found from the Great Lakes in the north, down to the Mexican Gulf in the south. Everywhere raccoons and bees are to be found, so is the Splinter Cat; honey and raccoons are the natural nourishments of this beast. The Splinter Cat seeks its prey within fully-grown trees and seemingly picks its targets randomly.

The technique used by the Splinter Cat to get to its food is primitive, but efficient. It simply climbs a tree and hurls itself like a torpedo against a neighboring tree. With its steel-hard skull, the cat cracks the tree open and takes a peek inside to locate a raccoon's nest or a honey stash. If that tree proves to be a blank draw the cat will continue to another tree. Thus great areas of forest can be devastated and it's easy for the inexperienced woodsman to come to the conclusion that the damage had been done by either storms or lightning.





The Gumberoo

This may very well be one of the most feared animals in the North American woods, but fortunately it's also one of the most rare. You will find the Gumberoo (though God knows why anyone would go looking) in cedar forests ravaged by brushfire. The beast makes its den beneath a burned tree and only crawls out to satisfy its hunger. Its appetite, once the creature starts eating, is considerable. Entire carriages, with horse and driver, have disappeared into the maw of the Gumberoo.

The Gumberoo has sometimes from afar been mistaken for a Black Bear, because of similarities in size and color. The blackened appearance of the Gumberoo may be due to its constant moving about in coal-filled surroundings. Besides that, the hide of the animal is completely hairless, except for its bushy eyebrows and well-developed beard. The Gumberoo can travel over great areas but its short legs prevent it from moving very fast. It fears no living thing, as its hide is tougher than any material known on earth. All projectiles, from Indian arrows to rifle bullets, simply bounce off its impenetrable skin. There are many sad stories about hunters who have taken aim between the eyes of the Gumberoo, just to have the bullet bounce right back between their own.

But the Gumberoo is not entirely invulnerable. The animal has proved to be highly flammable, which may explain its rarity. If the Gumberoo fails to outrun an approaching brushfire it expires in a loud explosion. Lumberjacks in the cedar forests have sometimes heard such strange noises and shortly thereafter smelt the aroma of burnt rubber. Thus they have from afar experienced the end of a Gumberoo.

One should also heed the notion of taking a photo of a Gumberoo, since even such pictures will become very flammable.





The Hodag



A Hodag is mainly to be found in Wisconsin, where it is firmly settled in the forest areas. It is said that the first Hodag emerged from the ashes of Paul Bunyan's giant ox Babe. When the great beast had reached the end of his life his body was cremated for seven years in order to cleanse his soul from all the profanities thrown at him by his master and other lumberjacks. The remains of the soul of the ox then crawled out of its ashes, exuding a foul stench. This was the Hodag; a shaggy, horned monster, with a humanoid face, tail and sharp spines on its back. According to folklore a new Hodag will emerge every time the bones of an ox is burned in the woods.

There are no less than three species of Hodag to be reckoned with. The Black Hodag seems to be the most common one and also the most ferocious. This monster grows to a length of about 7 ft and can weigh up to 185 lbs or more. The Cave Hodag is more timid and smaller than its relatives. It hides beneath upturned trees, in old mines and natural hollows in the mountains. It is endowed with at least three glowing eyes, which illuminates its way through subterranean paths. The Cave Hodag is apparently the most widely distributed kind and is found in Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Indiana and the Ozark Mountains of Missouri and Arkansas. It seems to prefer environments with plenty of limestone. The largest of the Hodag family is probably the Shovel-Nosed Hodag (*Nasobatilus hystrivorus*), which was expertly described by William

T. Cox ; "...Size, about that of a rhinoceros, very intelligent. Its hairless body suggestive of the origin of the patterns upon Mackinaw clothing, now used in the lumber woods. On the hodag's nose, instead of a horn there is a large spade-shaped bony growth, with peculiar phalanges, extending up in front of the eye, so that he can only see straight up." Cox reveals that the "shovel" is used for uprooting trees containing the favorite food of this Hodag; Porcupines. The Shovel-Nosed Hodag mainly keeps itself to bogs and marshland. It has stiff, joint-less legs, which makes it impossible for the animal to get up once it falls over. It therefore rests by leaning against a tree, attaching itself with the many spikes that grow out of its back. This is the only opportunity to surprise and overcome the beast. You simply cut down the tree it is leaning against.

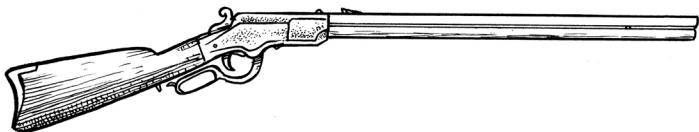


The Jackalope

The Jackalope is a rare horned species of rabbit from Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska. The first recorded observation took place in 1829 outside the town of Douglas, Wyoming. Unlike its hornless kin, the Jackalope is quite aggressive and uses its deer-like antlers in tests of strength against its peers, as well as for attacking other, impudent animals. Even humans are said to have been at the receiving end of its fury.

There are several good reasons one would like to capture a Jackalope. It makes a terrific trophy that will always be a great subject of discussion in your home. But there are better uses for this splendid animal; Jackalope milk is an enormously strong antidote for male erectile dysfunction. But milking a Jackalope can be both difficult and dangerous. There are no known domesticated individuals of this species, so any Jackalope-milker is sure to be an adventurous person with good experience in handling animals. One big benefit of Jackalope milk is that it's already homogenized due to the constant hopping around of the Jackalope.

But a Jackalope is not as easily caught. It is incredibly fast and can confuse a hunter by perfectly imitating the voices of other animals, including human speech. When pursued a Jackalope may utter statements such as "I say, isn't that a Jackalope running over there!?" or "Well, if it aint a Jackalope yonder them bushes!" Plain old cunning is the best weapon against the wits of this resourceful animal. You simply place a whiskey bottle where the Jackalope is said to pass. In the morning the bottle will be empty and the Jackalope so paralyzed with drunken stupor that you will be able to lift it by its ears and put it in a sack.





The Whirling Whimpus.

Sadly, it happens from time to time that people disappear in the woods. There are many theories as to what might have happened to them, and many of those are probable enough. One of the more convincing explanations originates from the Cumberland Mountains in Tennessee. There the learned scholars of nature speak of the Whirling Whimpus; one of the few primates of North America. The Whimpus can be said to resemble the Gorilla, but the arms are much larger and the legs much smaller. Its hands in particular are very sizeable and their grip is hard as iron.

The Whimpus will prepare its ambush by a bend in the road or behind a tree or a rock. When it catches the scent of its prey the Whimpus sets its body in motion by rotating it so fast that it can be mistaken for a small tornado. In most cases you won't even see the creature coming towards you. The only thing that can tell of an impending Whimpus-attack is the whirring sound made by the rotating ape. Most people hearing this peculiar noise think it comes from the trees, and will look up instead of down. This is, of course, a fatal mistake. When the Whimpus strikes it slaps its prey so hard with its large paws that the unfortunate victim immediately turns to syrup or jam. Then the beast can lick the substance off its paws to its contentment.





The Agropelter

Besides the Whirling Whimpus, the Agropelter is the only Native primate on the North American continent. It is a particularly vindictive little critter and it can even prove lethal if the odds are against you. The Agropelter looks harmless enough, with its recognizable monkey-like face and furry body. The arms are of a peculiar build, long and whip-like. It is these two extremities that make the Agropelter such a nasty little piece of work. When human civilization in the form of lumberjacks intrude, the Agropelter climbs to the top of a tree. From there it uses its flexible arms to hurl projectiles on unsuspecting passers-by. All is good and well when the Agropelter settles for using pine cones, but when it arms itself with heavy branches things start getting dangerous. Such confrontations have been known to end fatally.

The look of the Agropelter was in dispute for a long time. It is so skilled at staying hidden it took quite some time to find out what kind of animal it really was. When Big Ole Kittelsen was gathering timber in St. Croix he was hit over the head with a hefty branch. Fortunately this piece of wood was rotten through and through, and he didn't suffer any harm at all. When he turned to see where the branch had come from he spotted the monkey-like creature moving quickly from tree to tree until it disappeared from sight. It is said that the Agropelter feeds on woodpeckers and owls, but since these are quite rare birds there will never be any danger of a forest being overrun by Agropelters.





The Roperite

It is in the foothills of the Sierras of California that you can find one of the most specialized animals in the world. The beaver has its flat tail to help make it a superior swimmer, and the porcupine has its long quills for impeccable defense, but no animal has been more cleverly equipped by evolution than the Roperite. Exactly how this animal comes into the world is still a matter of debate. Some say it hatches from an egg, while others maintain that it must grow out of the ground like a mushroom. The Digger Indians are convinced the Roperites are the reborn spirits of the Spanish conquistadores. The Native Americans still remember the bloodthirsty ravages of the Europeans and found it fitting to liken this animal to their historic enemies.

The Roperite is a very efficient hunter. It is equipped with a pair of muscular hind legs which propel it to such dizzying speeds that people have mistaken the creature for having the ability to fly. Its feet are shaped as snow shoes and enable the critter to move across both water and quicksand, once it gets going. Its entire body is covered in leathery hide, as tough as the best of saddles. The Roperite can therefore plow through the thickest of thorny shrubbery without flinching. But more remarkable than anything else is its lasso-like snout. It is with this implement that the Roperite snares its prey and lashes it to the ground with deadly force. A. B. Patterson of Hot Springs has also observed that the Roperite is endowed with a tail similar to the rattlesnake's rattle. During pursuit the Roperite uses this to both excite itself and intimidate the hunted prey.





The Snaligaster

Few animals combine so many bad traits as the Snaligaster does. It is a rare one with its cunning, thieving and homicidal nature. The Snaligaster is also one of the rarest sights Mother Nature has to offer. This very large but agile beast is said to have the striped body of a tiger, two wings and a very long slithering tail. Its talons are long and fearsome. Its head is large and horrible, with a sharp beak, a crown of horns, and a single gazing eye.

The Snaligaster has over the years spread to the states of Washington, Ohio, New Jersey and West Virginia, where the inhabitants have with distaste observed its outline against the night sky. It also utters a blood-curdling cry, which makes tin roofs shrivel up and paint drop from the walls of houses. The Snallygaster will eat all living things that cross its path and can easily carry off both horses and cows. Humans are a frequent part of its diet. The Snallygaster is particularly tough on the moonshine business in the Washington Mountains, as it takes a special fancy to the locals and the liquid they produce. The people of a moonshine mountain will always take on a very special flavor. One night a Snallygaster was attracted to John Barlycorn's 2500-gallon vat of simmering alcohol. But the potent fumes became too much even for the fearsome creature and it crashed straight into the vat and drowned. That very moment two revenue agents appeared and blew up the vat together with the Snaligaster. Thus a valuable specimen was lost to science.

The Snaligaster also has a manic preference for household appliances. When the miracle of electricity slowly swept the North American continent fridges and freezers soon became popular items. These modernities also appealed to the Snaligaster in some strange way, for it didn't hesitate ripping whole roofs off buildings in order to get to them. Where the beast drops off his catch is anyone's guess but it is likely they are used to adorn the Snaligaster's nest.

The Snaligaster reproduces by laying an egg that is so large one would think an elephant is about to burst out of it. However, no one's ever seen such an egg hatched -an attempt in West Virginia to hatch a Snaligaster egg in a giant incubator failed.

Not surprisingly, Snaligaster hide will fetch a very high price on the market; up to \$100,000 a square foot. Snaligaster leather is in fact the only thing that can be used to polish the shine on punkel pearls (punkel pearls are of course the adornment of choice among the African tribes of Umbopeland). Both the Smithsonian Institute and President Theodore Roosevelt are said to have shown interest in finding a Snaligaster, dead or alive.

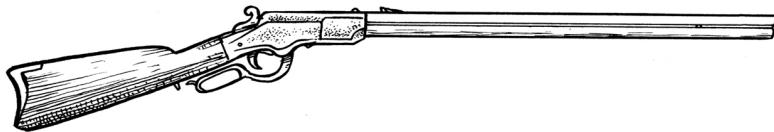


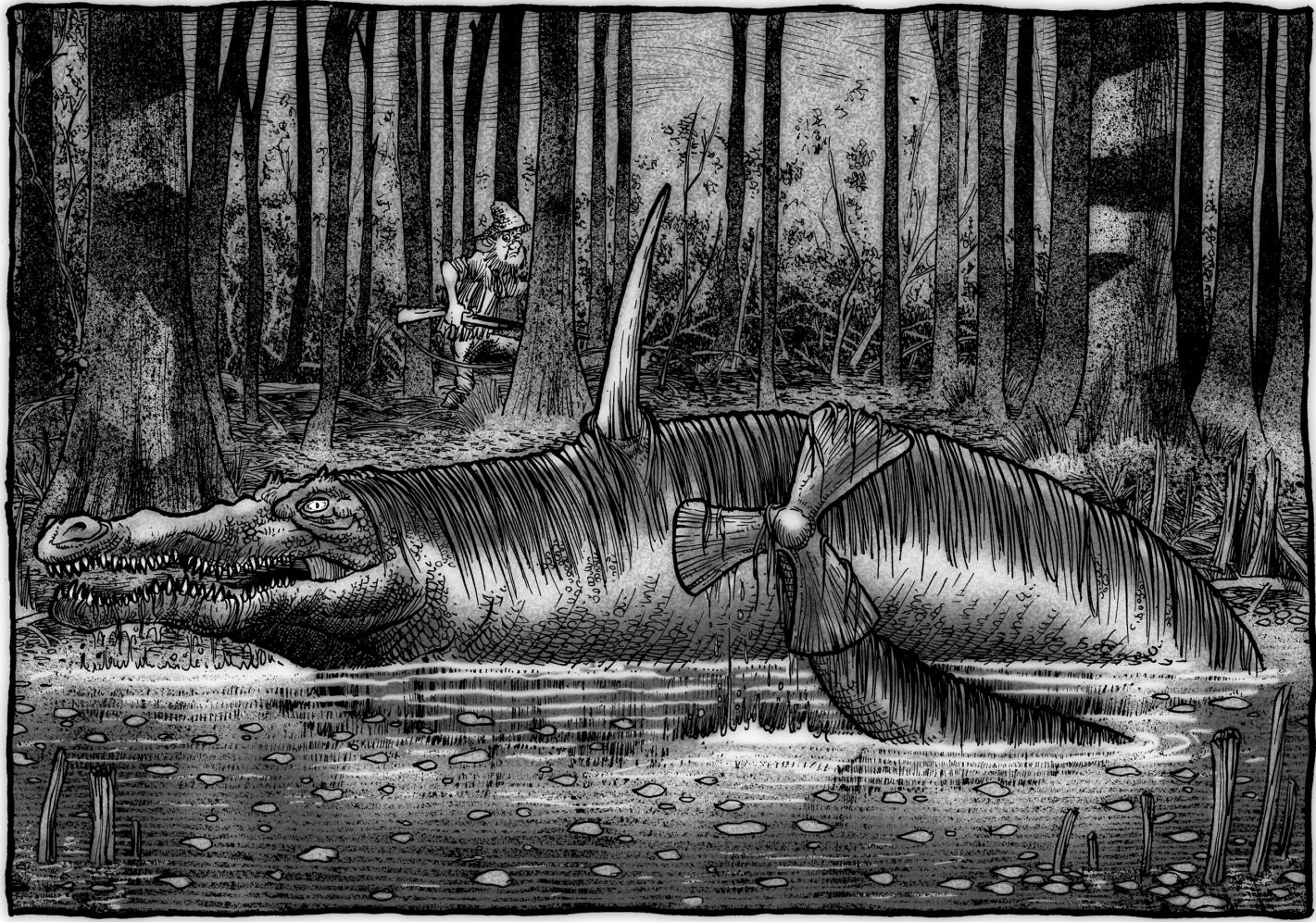
The Snoligoster

Despite a bewildering similarity of names the earthbound, amphibious Snoligoster has little in common with the flying Snaligaster. However, both have an appalling taste for human flesh and should be observed from a safe distance. The Snoligoster roams the cypress swamps of the South, particularly around Lake Okechobee, Florida. This very large predator bears a slight resemblance to the alligator. On closer inspection the back of the animal proves to be covered in long shining fur and adorned with a stout horn. The Snoligoster has no legs but still moves about with ease thanks to a propeller of hard ivory plates that rests on the tip of its tail. The fact is the Snoligoster can reach such speed during a chase that onlookers have mistaken it for a motorboat.

The cypress swamps are often visited by fishermen and hunters (and in olden times escaped slaves would sometimes hide there). These are the people the Snoligoster quenches its hunger with. The prey is tossed into the air with a flick of its tail and impaled on the horn. The Snoligoster will then dig out a hole in the river bank where the dead prey is stuffed, mashed with the propeller and sucked into the creature's mighty jaws.

The behavior of the Snoligoster is mainly described by Inman F. Elderedge, who met the beast while chasing an outlaw in DeFuniak Springs, Florida. He witnessed the end of the criminal as the Snoligoster caught the man and disposed of him in the above-described manner. Eldridge's first reaction was to shoot the beast in horror, but on second thought decided that it was doing a conservative contribution and let it go about its business.



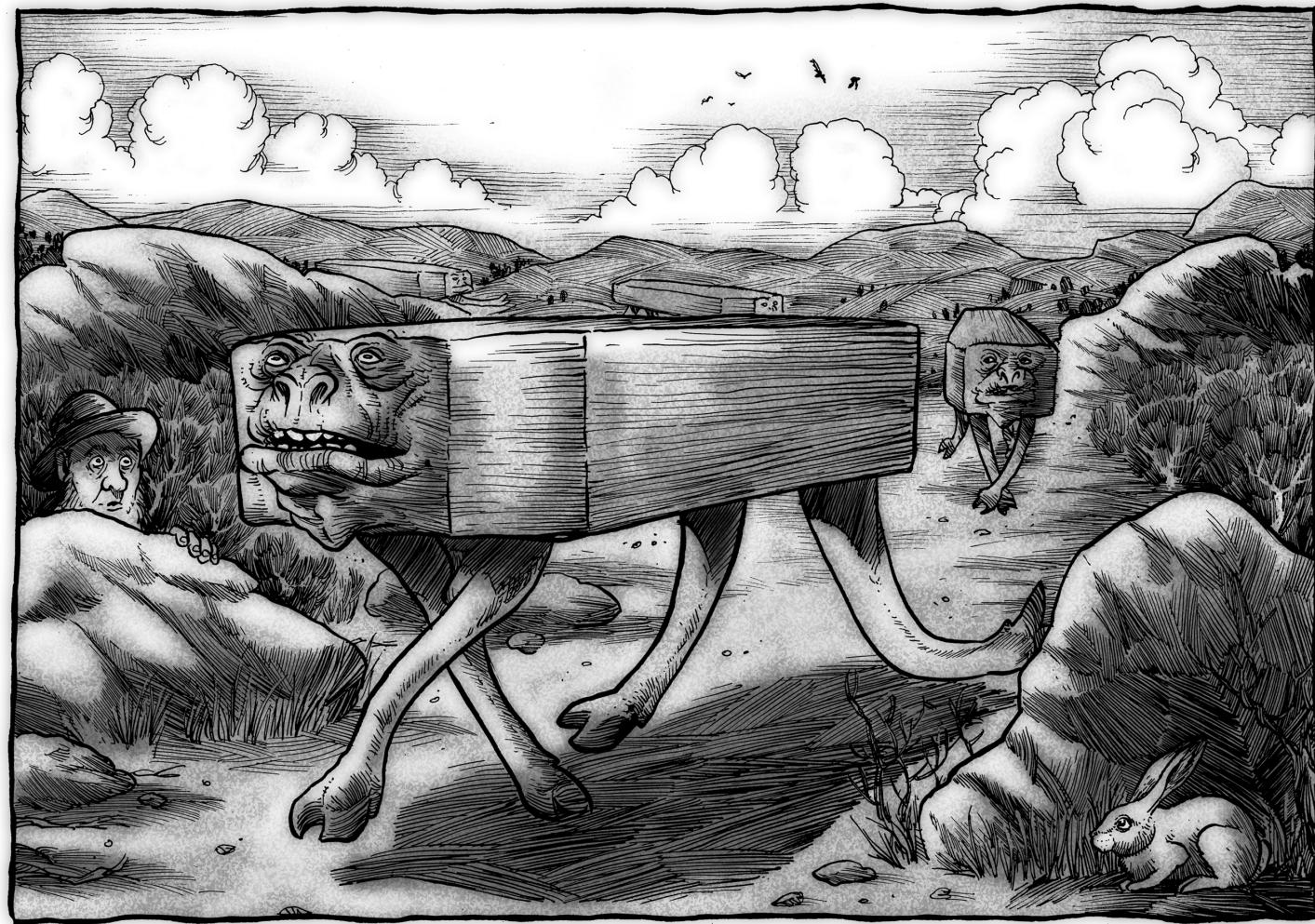


The Funeral Mountain Terrashot

This rare and strange beast seems to exist only around the Funeral Mountains of California. It may even be that the creature has given the location its curious name. The Terrashot's body is uncomfortably similar to the shape of a coffin. Its back is even covered with a hard, flat shell that will remind you of a coffin-lid. Its legs are long and wobbly and gives the animal's gait a somewhat intoxicated appearance.

All we know about the Terrashot comes from a Mormon gentleman with a keen interest in zoology. Spotting one of the creatures he climbed the mountains to find out all he could about the Terrashot. It was in fact Mormons who first encountered the Terrashot during their travels westward. The Terrashot originates from the green valleys found between the mountains of California. Here the animals live and breed until their number outgrows the natural balance of the valley. When this happens the Terrashot population leaves the valley in a long trail, not dissimilar to the wandering lemming. But when they venture out into the desert the change in temperature between the cool valley and the hot desert becomes too much. The animals expand rapidly and explode with a loud bang. The only remaining trace is a grave-shaped hole in the ground.



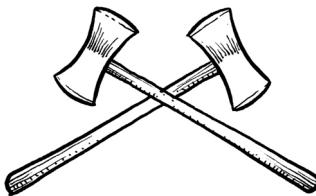


The Slide-Rock Bolter

The picturesque mountains of Colorado are a lovely place to visit, but they do have one obvious hazard that may make you want to reconsider any possible travel plans. These mountains are the home of the Slide-Rock Bolter, named after its lightning speed and its means of locomotion.

The Slide-Rock Bolter is a huge whale-like animal living on mountain slopes steeper than 45 degrees. Its tail is equipped with a flipper shaped as two powerful grappling hooks. These are used to grab hold of the peak of the mountain, thereby allowing the beast to remain secured and immobile for long stretches of time. The eyes are small and insignificant, as are the ears, but the mouth is vast and cavernous. It is probably by smell that the Slide-Rock Bolter hunts. It stays hidden behind a wall of trees until an unsuspecting lumberjack or camper enters the area below the mountain. The Slide-Rock Bolter then releases its grip of the mountain peak and comes rushing down the slope like a bat out of hell. An oily slime is secreted along the corners of its mouth and works as a lubricant for its massive body. All living things that get in the path of the Slide-Rock Bolter are shoveled into its big mouth. It's easy to see where the creature has its hunting path, since all the trees on the steepest side of a mountain will be down. Of course, it may not be easy for the inexperienced camper or tourist to make such a judgment.

A ranger who's district stretched between the mountains Ophir Peak and Lizard Head is the only man known to have been able to get rid of a Slide-Rock Bolter. He simply rigged a dummy dressed as a camper and filled it with gunpowder and fulminate caps. The very next day a Slide-Rock Bolter from Lizard Head attacked the dummy, setting the bomb off when the contraption reached the stomach acids of the beast. The explosion was so powerful it knocked down all the houses in the nearby community of Rico and an area of several acres was filled with pieces of Slide-Rock Bolter (to the enjoyment of the buzzards).



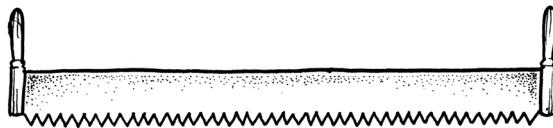


The Sliver Cat

Many people venturing out into the wilderness rightfully fear an attack from the cougar. But there is another feline that warrants even greater respect; the bloodthirsty and cunning Sliver Cat.

This predator makes its home in the forests of northeast North America. The Sliver Cat usually leaves its hiding place at dusk and when the average working day is ending. So it is when the lumberjacks return home that the danger is at its greatest. The Sliver Cat sits concealed in the foliage of a tree, awaiting a prey passing by. When a blissful woodsman comes within reach the cat will use its horrid tail to attack and to complete the hunt. The long and muscular tail ends in a club armed with several big spikes. The prey is impaled on this terrible weapon and hoisted up into the tree, where the Sliver Cat uses its claws and the tail-spikes to cut the poor victim into tasty minced meat.

Lumberjack legend Paul Bunyan cursed the Sliver Cat, which consumed so many of his workmates. The eyes of the Sliver Cat glow like burning coals and are the only thing that will reveal its presence. The cat is therefore always squinting with its eyes while still trying to keep a keen watch out for its prey.





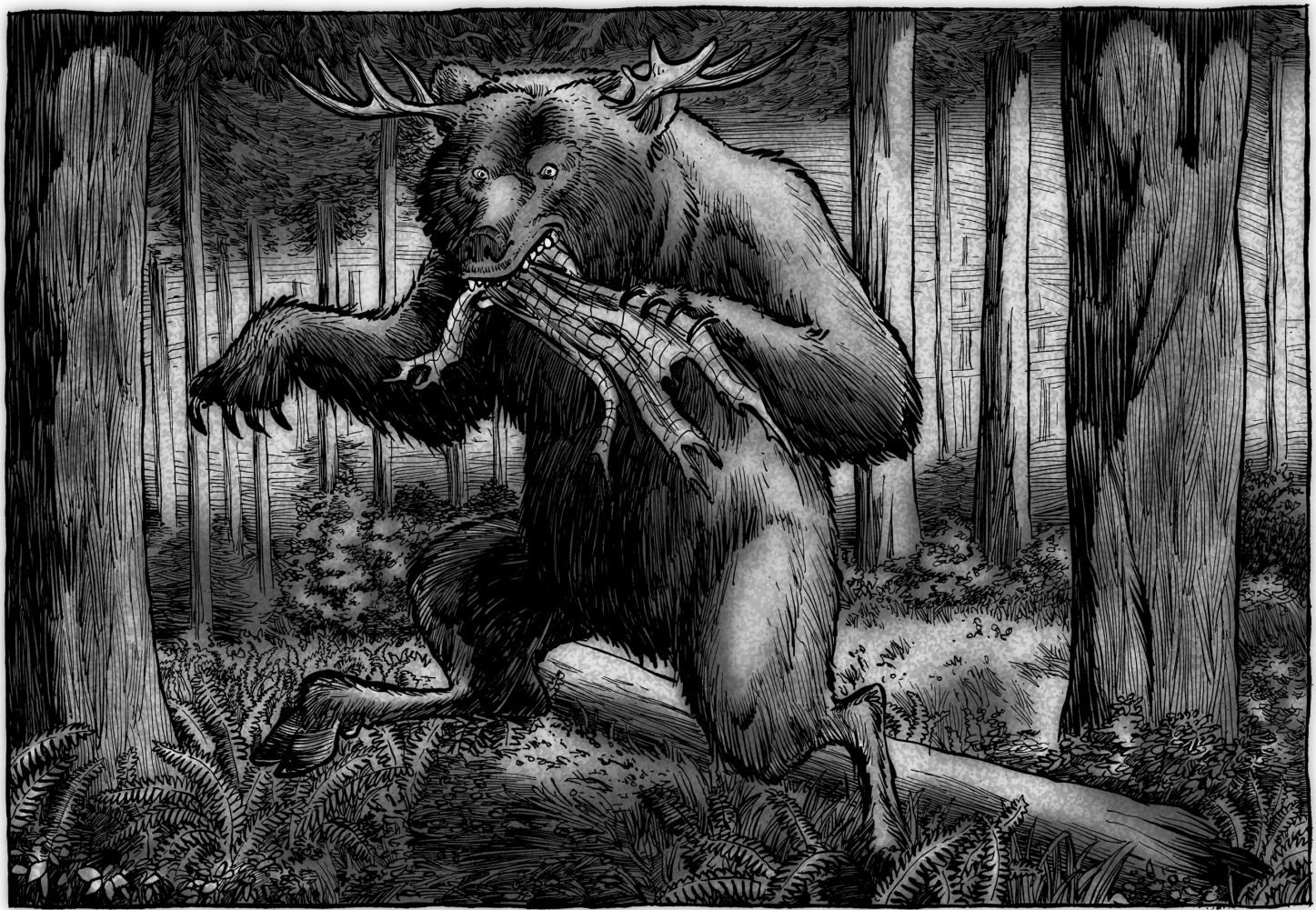
The Tote Road Shagamaw

From Rangely Lakes in Maine to New Brunswick in Canada hunters and lumberjacks have been baffled by strange footprints appearing around lodges and camps. To the horror of many it would seem that the place has been visited by a very large bear, and such guests are wisely driven away as far as possible. But after having tracked this "bear" for a while the tracks of the large predator suddenly turn into the tracks of a moose. The baffled hunters have nothing more to do than to break off the hunt and return home.

The answer to this puzzle is indeed simple; a Shagamaw's been at it. The hindquarters of the Shagamaw are bewilderingly similar to the legs of a moose, and since it walks in an upright position only these tracks will be made. But the Shagamaw is endowed with a very cunning behavior, which will fool even the most experienced hunter. After 440 footsteps the Shagamaw lets the bear-like upper portion of its body do the work and walks on its front paws instead. After another 440 steps the beast will again switch to its hind legs.

The Shagamaw may have an arresting appearance but is probably not a very dangerous animal. It does however have a diet that causes the logging industry some trouble. It only eats the checkered fabric that lumberjack shirts are made of. Shirts hung to dry within the habitat of the Shagamaw are not likely to last long and the clothing bill might soon grow cumbersome for lumberjacks not inclined to walk around half-naked.



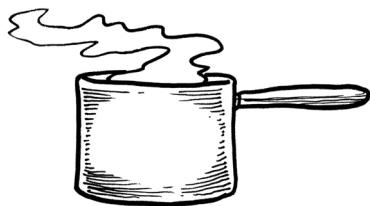


The Bildad

If you have ever visited Boundary Pond in northwestern Maine you've no doubt heard a splashing sound, reminiscent of when a paddle strikes water. In such a case you have witnessed the hunting techniques of the rare Bildad. This peculiar animal is about the size of a beaver and also resembles this rodent in its bodily shape. However, its hind legs are more like those of the kangaroo and have the same springy effect. Also, the mouth is more similar to the beaks of birds of prey.

The Bildad hunts in its very own, but effective, way. It monitors the lake from a grassy point overlooking the water and when it spots a fish it will bound over the water with a powerful leap. When the Bildad passes over the fish it will strike the water with its powerful tail and in this way stun its prey. The fish is then hastily retrieved and eaten. Adult Bildads have been reported having jumped as far as sixty yards in a single bound!

The use of Bildad meat in lumberjack cuisine is a subject of great debate. The animal is said to be very fine eating but may also cause unpleasant side effects. The first (and only) man known with certainty to having tasted Bildad meat was Bill Murphy of The Great Northern Paper Company. The cook had prepared a sweet-smelling Bildad stew, but when Bill tasted it his entire appearance was altered. His body turned stiff and his eyes took on an ominous glassy stare. With a howl he ran out of the camp, straight down to the lake and took a fifty-yard jump out over the water. But as his swimming capabilities were highly inadequate he sunk like a rock and drowned. After this incident, Bildad meat is understandably banned from the lunch menus of the Maine lumberjack camps.



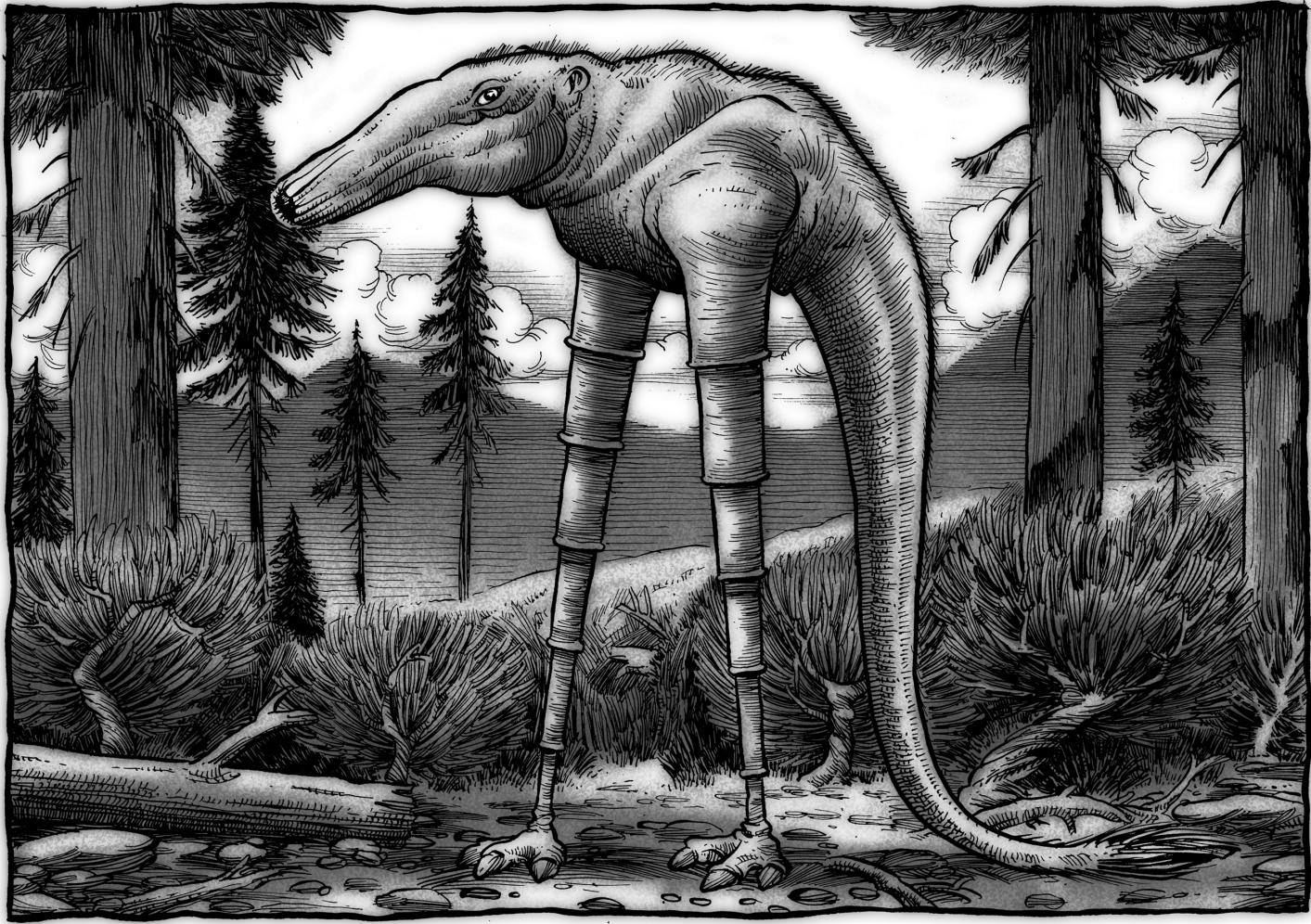


The Tripedero

In the chaparral and foothill forests of California you find all manner of smaller animals, from lizards and spiders to mice and rabbits. They are all hunted by a master of the art of ambush -the Tripedero. This quaint creature lies flat against the ground until it hears or catches the scent of something that awakens its interest. Then it rises up on its two telescopic legs to get a better view over its domain. The Tripedero is a relatively small animal, but solidly built. Its tail makes up the greater part of its body and is probably used for balancing purposes. Its head is of special interest, since it is equipped with one of the more unusual weapons of the animal kingdom. The mouth and snout of the Tripedero consists of a long tube, from which the animal fires stones and clay pebbles. These projectiles are kept in its left cheek until a prey appears. The contents of its cheek are then dislodged towards the prey with fatal speed and accuracy through the tubular mouth. When the kill is accomplished the Tripedero contracts its legs and crawls unseen through the bushes towards its prey.

There are stories about how the Tripedero has tried to take down humans and almost succeeded. A stone shot from the mouth of the Tripedero is said to maintain its speed and force for at least ten yards. It is plainly understood that being hit by such a projectile isn't a pleasant experience but there are no known cases with a fatal outcome.





The Cactus Cat

While traveling through the great Southwest you may, if you're lucky, spot the only completely vegetarian feline in the world. The Cactus Cat can be found between Prescott and Tuscon and also in Yucatan and Yaqui in Mexico. It roams the most desolate parts of the desert, hunting for the cacti that can often be found in such places.

When the cat is standing still it can easily be mistaken for its prey. This animal can be bewilderingly similar to the cactus plant. Its fur consists of course tufts of hair, covering its body in long rows. These tufts are somewhat longer on its ears. Its tail divides into several little stumps, which gives it a branch-like appearance. The insides of its front legs are covered with double rows of sharp spurs, and it is these implements that the cat uses on the cacti.

The Cactus Cat will attack the cactus plant by clawing at its trunk until the sap starts running. Several cacti are molested in this manner until the cat eventually returns to the cactus it first attacked. By then the sap will have fermented ever so slightly and is lapped up by the cat. During the course of an evening the cat will gradually become intoxicated and start singing rude songs picked up from cowboys and gold diggers.



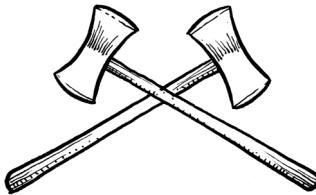


The Squonk

This strange animal has a very limited distribution, and that may be just as well. Only a few people outside of Pennsylvania have ever heard about the Squonk. It is in the hemlock woods of this state that the sad creature may be found at dawn or dusk.

The Squonk is always unhappy and that's no wonder. Its hide is wrinkled and covered with warts, and seems ill fitting for its small stature. Because of its ugliness, the Squonk hardly ever shows its face outside of its den, not even in the company of other squonks. Its self-esteem is incredibly low and it lives a miserable life of solitary self-pity. Squonk hunters track their prey by following the trail of tears provided by the ever-sobbing animal. According to veteran Squonk hunter J. P. Wentling it's easier to track the Squonk on cold moonlit nights when the tears will freeze and the animal stays mostly immobile.

To catch a Squonk is one thing, to keep it is another matter entirely. Poacher, moonshine fabricant, et cetera Mule McSneed once caught a Squonk and put the weeping animal in a sack. But all that was left when he reached his home was a wet blotch in the bottom of the sack; the Squonk had completely dissolved into tears. Squonk hunting is therefore a quite stupid pastime. No man is born that won't be ever so slightly depressed when encountering the Squonk. The nutritional value of this animal is also highly debatable.





The Hoop Snake

The tropics are not the only place where one must heed the possible presence of large venomous snakes. If you're unlucky you may in fact fall prey to the deadly bite of the Hoop Snake while traveling through the St. Croix River valley, on the Minnesota-Wisconsin border. The very legendary cowboy Pecos Bill had a lot to say about this reptile and was also unfortunate enough to encounter it on numerous occasions. Had he not been astride his trusted steed, the lightning-quick Widowmaker, he might not have escaped to tell the tale.

The swift locomotion of this snake comes about when it bites its own tail to shape its body into that of a great wheel. It then starts rolling after its prey until its speed overcomes that of the hunted target. The snake can then decide between two ways of killing -either it releases the dagger-like tip of its tail and uses it to impale its prey, or it will lunge forward and attack with its deadly fangs.

The poison of the Hoop Snake is so potent it probably has no equal in the animal kingdom. Mule McSneed had the great misfortune to meet the snake on a wooded slope. McSneed may have been quick when he had to be but he was no match for the agile reptile. Eventually he decided to take refuge behind a big tree and not a moment too soon. The snake slammed its fangs into the tree and pumped it so full of venom the tree swelled up to double its natural size. Since its most powerful weapon was now depleted, the snake gave up the hunt and slithered off. When Mule McSneed returned to the spot the next day the tree had swelled even more and was now so voluminous an entire parish could have been fitted inside of it. This was an opportune moment for McSneed, who had been thinking about building a new barn for his cattle. He chopped down the tree and hastily made long planks of its wood. Not before long had he raised them up around the cows and put a roof on top. But during the following days the venom evaporated and the planks started to shrink to the normal size of the wood, until the barn was no bigger than a doghouse. Living conditions obviously became unbearable for the cows and McSneed was forced to tear down his construction.

What McSneed didn't know about, but Pecos Bill could've demonstrated, was the only sure-fire way of escaping a Hoop Snake. You simply wait for the snake to get close enough and then you jump *through* the hoop before the animal strikes. The snake cannot change its speed or direction and can only attack prey in front of it.



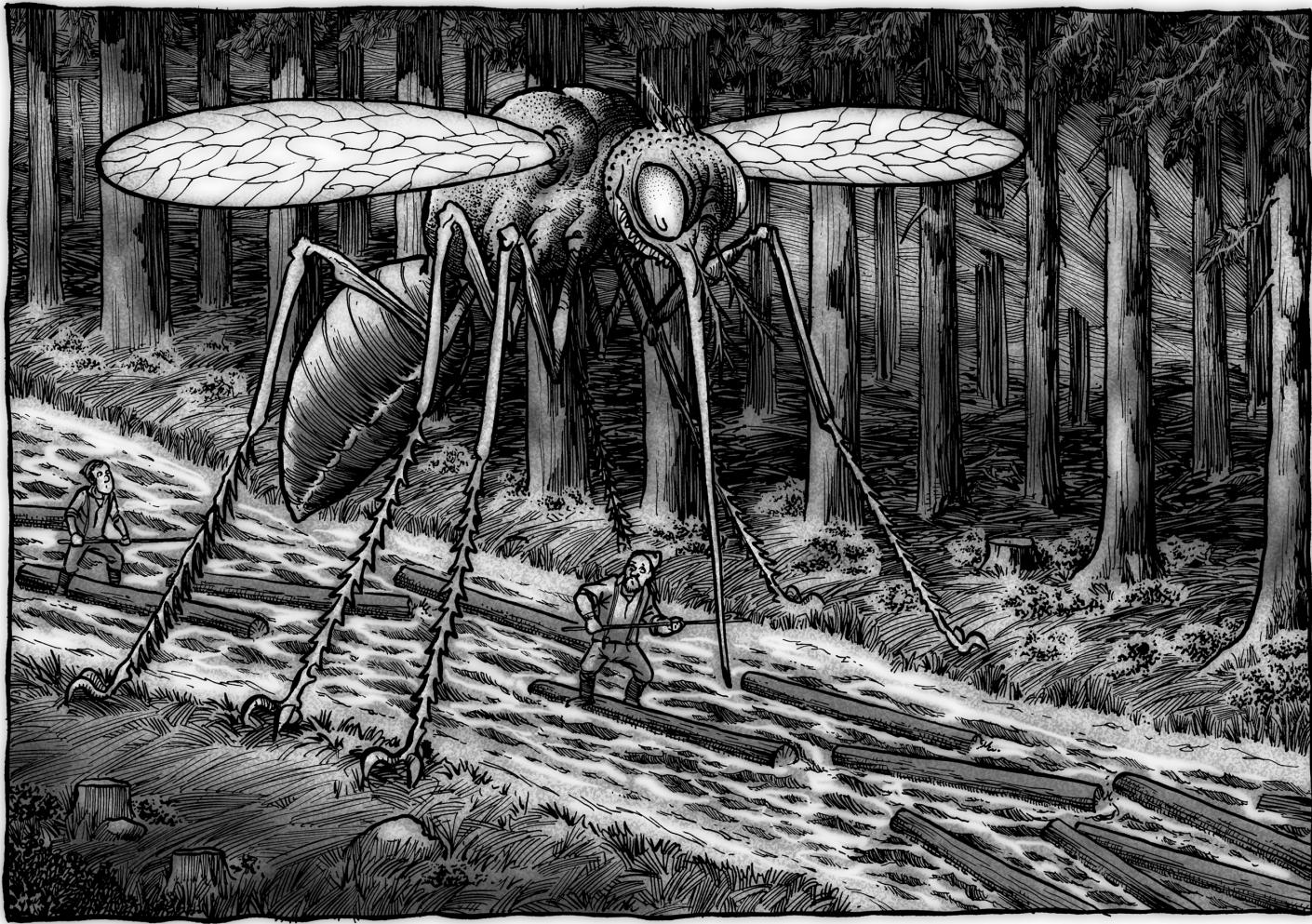
Unusual mosquitoes

Ordinary gnats and mosquitoes can be irritating enough but some species are more troublesome than others. At the top of the list of "Insects I don't care for meeting" we find the so-called "Arkansas Snipe." This mosquito won't hesitate gulping down horses, cows and even a few people now and then. A hunter who had lost his way tied his horse to a tree and then climbed a hilltop to get his bearings. When he returned he found, to his horror, that a giant mosquito had almost completely devoured his horse, eating his way from the horse's behind and forward. But when the mosquito reached the head and stuck his snout into the bridle the hunter jumped onto his back and tightened the reigns. After a few hours of bronco busting the mosquito accepted his fate and became a trusted, but talked-about steed. When the Arkansas Snipes go hunting for cows they leave nothing behind from their grizzly meal, except for the horns of the cow, which they use to pick their teeth.

One of the biggest men in Arkansas, Bill Jenkins, woke up one night, finding that two mosquitoes had grabbed him and were now flying off with him. He tried to, by force and noise, make them release him, but to no avail. Suddenly one of the mosquitoes said: "Are we eating him now, or should we wait 'til we get to the bog?" "Better we eat him now," replied the other mosquito. "If we wait 'til we get to the bog the BIG mosquitos' ll just grab him and eat him themselves!"

A similar mosquito problem plagues South Carolina. An old timer who owned a bit of woodland was out inspecting the property when a giant mosquito cornered him. No matter how the man ran or capered about he couldn't lose his pursuer and finally he ducked down behind a tree, hoping for the best. The mosquito was so into the chase it couldn't evade the tree and ran its stinger straight through the tree trunk. The old man then quickly bent the stinger that came out his side of the tree and gave the pest a good whack over the head with his ax, instantly killing it. In those days nothing was left to be spoilt so the old man built a sturdy fence from the mosquito's legs.

Lumberjack giant Paul Bunyan finally got fed up with the bloodsucking beasts and corralled a swarm of fierce bumblebees from the South to rid him of the problem. For years the mosquitoes and the bumblebees waged a savage war, but eventually a peace treaty was signed between them and the worst imaginable thing happened; the two breeds started interbreeding. The resulting hybrids were insects bigger and nastier than anything before them. These so-called "Miskittos" can sometimes be seen standing straddle-legged across the Chippewa River, snatching loggers from the log drives as they float down stream.



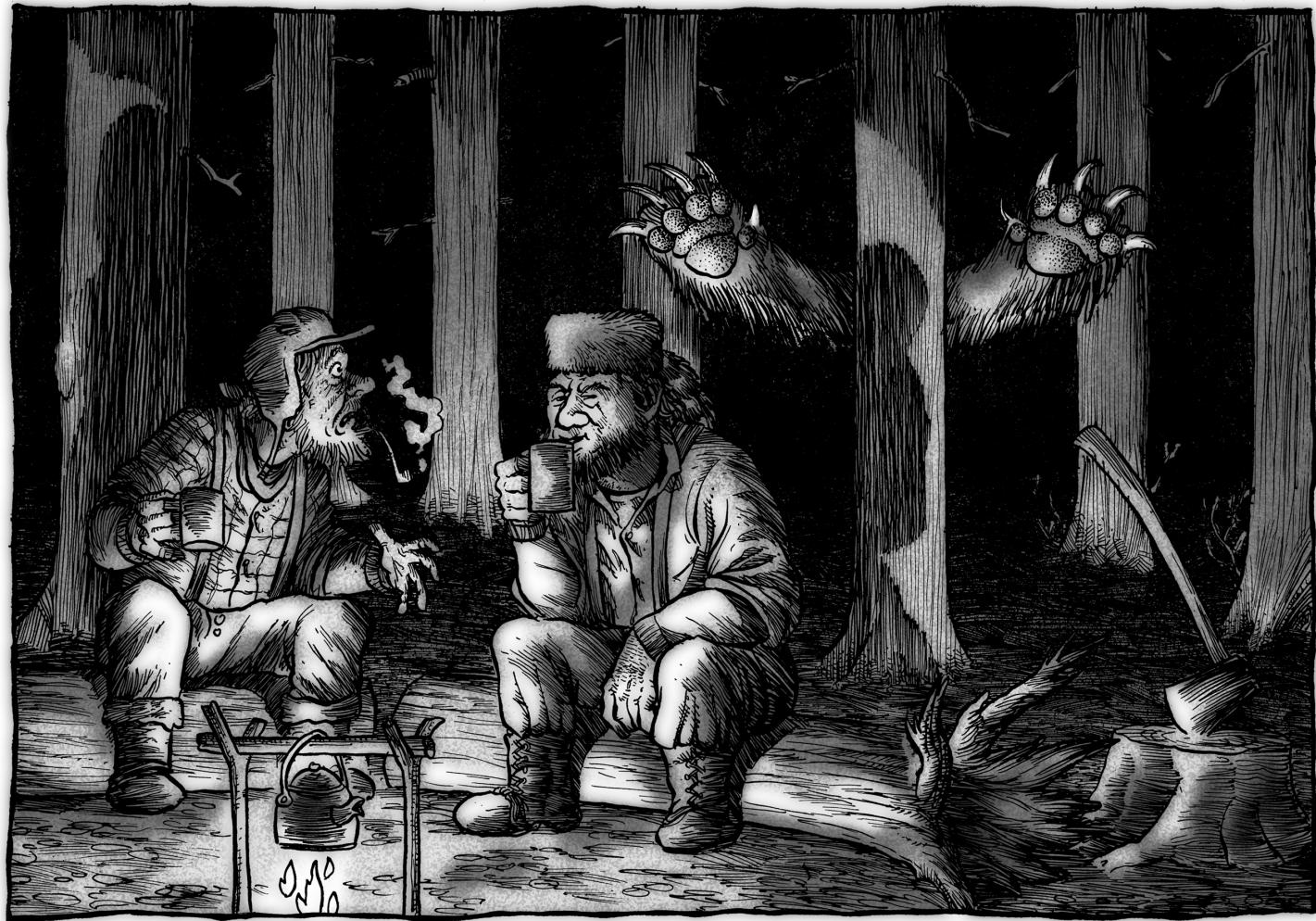
The Hide-Behind

One can with certainty state that the Hide-Behind breed is one of the worst pests of the North American woodland. They seem to be spread all across the northern half of the US and can be found in all kinds of terrain where there's something to hide behind.

This animal has, as its name suggests, a highly developed skill at using its surroundings to make itself invisible. This also includes living beings. If the Hide-Behind is startled by a predator it simply takes cover behind its foe and stays there, no matter what moves the other animal may make. Ordinarily the Hide-Behind will find cover behind immobile objects, like trees, rocks and reeds.

There are several subspecies of the Hide-Behind, but they are all poorly documented since no one's seen them. It is, however, known that a smaller member of the family resides in earth dens, drainage pipes and the like. Another type is said to be large as a Wolverine, or even a bear, and has been known to attack people. The Hide-Behinds are fiercely territorial and will strike back in swift and deliberate attacks. The breed is equipped with a most effective weapon; the ability to project a wave of intense displeasure or even terror at its intended victim. This will render that victim week-kneed and quite unable to dodge the following attack from the animal.





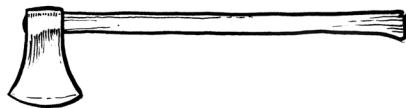
The Sidehill Gouger

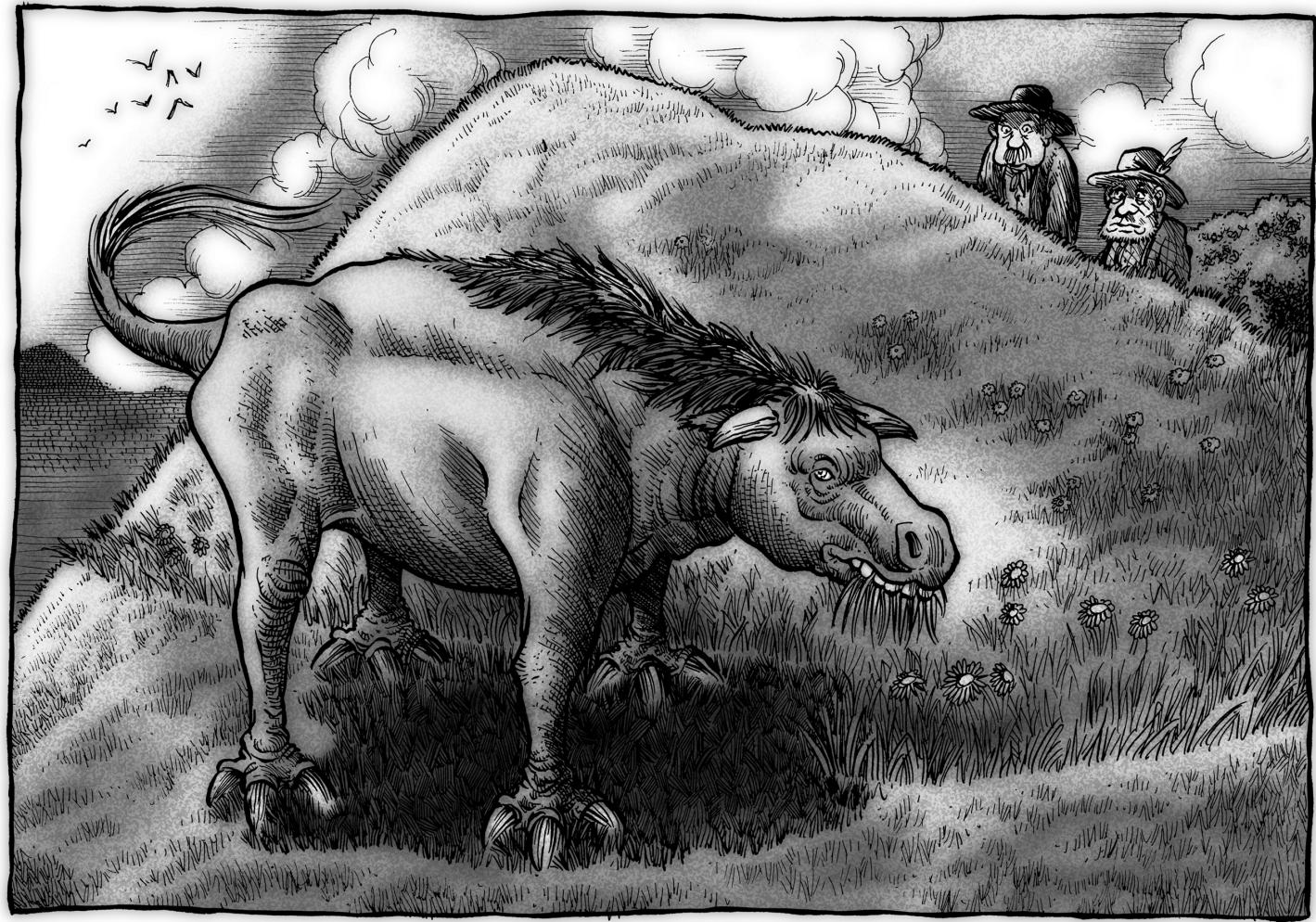
This queer beast is yet another example of how nature can sometimes specialize a species for a single purpose, but also how such specialization can result in certain drawbacks. The Sidehill Gouger is said to inhabit the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia and the southwestern sand hills of Saskatchewan. It is a slow-moving and placid animal that lives off the various plants it comes across. It will seek out very steep mountain slopes and has a physical peculiarity that makes this type of terrain a perfect habitat; the legs on one side of the body are shorter than the legs on the other side. Due to this the animal can always walk in an upright, perfectly balanced position. According to keen-eyed hunters and loggers there are two types of Sidehill Gouger; those who graze clockwise and those who graze counter-clockwise.

Of course, when such an animal is forced to retreat to normal, flat ground, seeking out new pastures for instance, it will experience some trouble moving about. In such terrain The Sidehill Gouger is a clumsy creature with a lop-sided, zigzagging gait. Some people have tried to domesticate the beast, but its low-country handicap makes such an arrangement quite impossible.

The Sidehill Gouger is not known to be hunted for food, but rather its very special hide. The part of the body that is facing the mountain as it grazes will eventually turn extremely tough and durable. The leather made from Sidehill Gouger hide is therefore highly regarded by makers of belts and bags.

There are a few other animals with similar attributes, such as the Scottish Wild Haggis, the Vermont Wampahoofus and the Rackaboar from the Southwest US. There's a story about two rackaboars that once met on a very narrow cliff-ledge. Neither of them wanted to back up, so they remained there, glaring at each other, until they both starved to death.





Uncommon fish

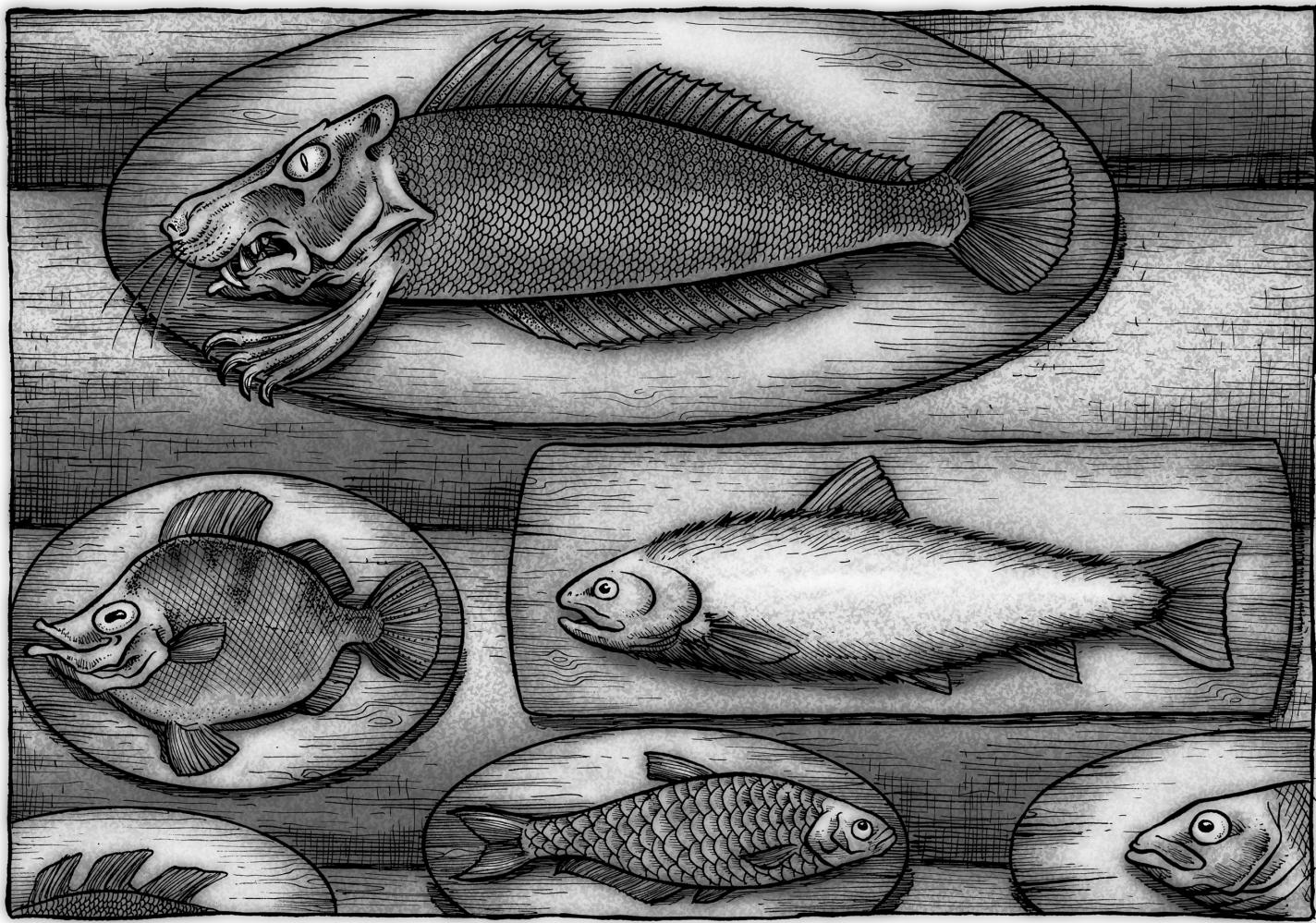
The waterways of the great wilderness can also display an array of unusual and interesting specimens. Many breeds of fish have specialized themselves according to habitat and preference of food. The Cougar Fish is indeed said to have a very tasty flesh when cooked with proper care, but it is just as likely that the fisherman will end up in the stomach of the fish. The Cougar Fish is very large and equipped with fierce claws on its front fins. Its habit is to stealthily await an inexperienced fisherman and then pull him beneath the surface of the water, where it will engage in a ghastly meal. When Paul Bunyan was head of a group of lumberjacks he lost many a good man to the hungry Cougar Fish. He promised a big reward to anyone who could rid the rivers of Cougar Fish, but this campaign was so successful in spreading the message, the fish read about it too and vanished from the rivers until things had settled down.

The peaceful Giddy Fish is an entirely different kind of creature. Its flesh is highly elastic and the fish is only eaten because of its availability. If you catch a Giddy Fish you simply slam it into the ground, making it bounce about. When the other fish see this they get encouraged to start bouncing themselves and pretty soon the waters explode with airborne fish. It is then easy to pick them by hand.

When fishing in Canada you may be lucky enough to catch the rare fury trout. This fish prefers the colder, deeper lakes, but has been forced to grow fur in order to cope with freezing temperatures. Like the wild hare it will change the color of its fur from a darker complexion to a wintry white. It is also said to have been found in the Arkansas River, where there's a different story about its origin. Four jugs of hair tonic were accidentally spilled into the river somewhere around the 1870s and the result of this mishap became evident soon enough.

The Goofang fish lives in streams with a very strong current, but due to its sensitive eyes it's always swimming backwards. A similar breed lives in dried-out riverbeds and also swims backwards to keep sand out of its eyes.

A fish that completely shuns the waterways is the Upland Trout, who builds its nests in trees. It is a delicious fish but somewhat difficult to find. Tender feet and city folk visiting logging camps are usually sent out into the woods to catch the shy Upland Trout, in order to gain some outback experience.



Various beasts

The Rumptifusel

This predator is about the size of a man and displays a particularly devious hunting technique. It simply embraces a tree, thereby making its body look entirely like a fur coat. When a frozen lumberjack passes by he will see the inviting coat, put it on and get devoured by the Rumptifusel.

The Axehandle Hound

This is a critter that can make a real mess in a lumberjack camp. It superficially resembles a dachshund but its hatchet-like head and elongated body also reminds one of the common logger's axe. The axehandle hounds will sneak into a camp during the night and eat all the axe handles, leaving only the hatchet heads.

The Lufferlang

This vicious beast is as large as a full-grown wolf and moves stealthily about the woods during dusk. It is easily recognized by its blue stripe running along its back, as well as by the very large fangs it displays right before it bites. The Lufferlang has legs that can be swiveled and turned in any direction, thus making it a very effective pursuer as it can quickly change direction without having to slow down. Luckily it only bites once a year, so if you meet a Lufferlang that has already bitten, you're quite safe. A Lufferlang is also said to fear its own reflection.

The Cyascute

The Cyascute makes its home in barren woodlands with poor soil, where it eats rocks on slopes and hillsides. This animal is about the size of a deer, which it also resembles except for having long rabbit-like ears, teeth like a cougar and telescopic legs, which enables it to graze on very sloped hills without loosing its balance. It is usually seen after a snake bite.



Timmerdoodle

This furry little animal (about the size of a rabbit) can at first glance seem perfectly harmless –that is, until you feel its long fangs sinking into your rear. The Timmerdoodle has an uncomfortable fondness for human buttocks. It is also capable of locking its jaws so any attempts of removing the critter will be futile. The only thing to do is to wait for a thunderstorm; the first crash of thunder will make it release its bite. Mule McSneed had to wait two months for the Timmerdoodle stuck to his behind to let go.

The Wunk

One of Nature's masters of passive defense. When a wunk feels threatened it digs a hole, jumps into it and then drags the hole down with it. No trace of the animal being there is then to be seen.

The Squidgicum-Squee

Quite possibly superior to the Wunk. When this animal needs to hide it simply takes a deep breath and swallows itself.

Kickle-Snifters

These inch-long creatures build their nests within the beards of old men, where they live lives of constant amusement. The hairs of the beard are always tickling them and they cannot stop giggling.

The Milamoo Bird

This bird lives around very shallow lakes where it plucks juicy worms living in the shore mud. Its powerful beak and broad feet make it a very effective worm hunter, but not always does the hunt end in favor of the bird. The worms have devised a quite effective defense. As the bird tugs at one end of the worm, the other end will hold on for as long as possible. Then the worm lets go and comes hurtling out of the mud with the speed of a bullet and smacks the bird right between its eyes. This will bewilder the bird long enough for the worm to escape.



The Goofus Bird

Unlike its kin the Goofus bird flies backwards, since it prefers to see where it's been instead of where it's going. This reactionary bird also builds its nests upside down, just like the Fillyloo Crane, the Fillamaloo Bird and the Bogie Bird.

The Foodo Bird

Not many beings on this planet know how they will end their days, but the Foodo Bird has this dubious pleasure. It spends its entire life flying in an ever-diminishing circle until it one day flies into its own rear-end and disappears.

The Joint Snake

When danger threatens this reptile will display its ability to split apart in no less than a dozen pieces. Every piece will wriggle off and eventually rejoin again when no peril is evident.

The Whangdoodle

Another of these critters best avoided. The Whangdoodle is said to be native to North Carolina, but has been seen in other parts of the Southeast. It is similar to the cougar but has very large ears and wool-like fur. It usually eats only pigs but will also gobble up any unwary travelers.



Fearsome Critters under the magnifying glass

Some industrious people have not stopped at vivid oral descriptions of strange beasties, but also added ambitious physical reconstructions to their repertoire. In some cases such presentations have proved to be very lucrative.



covered with black fur and its back was covered with a crest of sharp spines. Its head seemed oversized, with a human-like face and great oxen horns. Its legs were short but sturdy and its tail ended in a javelin-pointed tip. The beast excreted a foul stench that, according to Sheppard, was a mixture of "buzzard meat and skunk perfume." The Hodag greeted Sheppard with flaming breath and soon chased off the intruder.

But Sheppard rallied some villagers and lumberjacks in a counter-attack. Armed with "heavy rifles and large bore squirt guns loaded with poison water" the troupe confronted the Hodag not far from where Sheppard had first encountered it.

One of the more popular Fearsome Critters is the Hodag, which has been borrowed between many states and tellers. In 1893 exciting news came from Rhinelander, Wisconsin, that a Hodag had not only been captured but also photographed. The hero of the occasion was Eugene Simeon Sheppard (or Shepperd, depending on the source) (1854-1923). The Rhinelander Hodag made its entrance during the fall of 1893, when timber merchant, real estate broker and village jokester Sheppard encountered the monster in the woods near a loggers' camp. Though he had never seen a Hodag before he recognized the beast from many stories. Its lizard-like body was



A group of dogs first attacked but the Hodag quickly made mince meat of them all. Not one of the weapons they had brought made as much as a dent in the monsters' skin. Luckily someone thought of bringing dynamite and some sticks tossed at the Hodag ended its life in a violent explosion. Unfortunately, only some charred coal lumps were left of the Hodag; hardly any supporting evidence of the ghastly adventure. However, someone had brought a camera and no less than two descriptive photos were taken. The most famous one shows a black, dog-like, horned critter standing on a log over a boy that was obviously felled by the creature. Surrounding this tableau stands a big crowd of men armed with guns, pitchforks, axes and other implements. The other photo is a close-up of the Hodag with notes by Shepard, speculating that it is a "remnant of the rehistoric Dinasauers."

In 1896 Shepard actually captured another Hodag using chloroform to drug it. This Hodag was displayed by its proud tamer at a local fair, and became a huge success. The attending crowd was packed into a small, half-lit tent where the Hodag was presented on stage separated from the audience by a curtain and some good distance. Shepard told the spectators his adventurous story while the Hodag moved about and growled impressively. The majority of those who left the tent seemed convinced they had witnessed nothing less than a sensation. Shepard toured other fairs and made a hefty profit off the spectacle, until the hoax was revealed, of course. The Hodag was a wooden puppet covered in ox hide and adorned with horns from oxen and other cattle. This monstrosity was operated by wires pulled by Shepard's son, who also supplied the growls.

Let's return to the photos, which of course were of no better salt than the fairground attraction. They have been verified as genuinely taken in the late 1800s and showing Shepard himself standing to the far right holding a large stick. The Hodag of the photos seems to be the same, or at least a similar one, to the Hodag displayed by Shepard a few years later. The photo with the Hodag hunting party became a widely spread postcard, as an effort to market idyllic Rhinelander. The image also appeared as a larger framed image, decorating the walls in bars.

Shepard's apparent deception wasn't as great a sin as one might assume. In 1896 Rhinelander was going downhill. The community sprouted around the logging industry, but now the many mills of the area closed down one by one. When the trees

started to disappear, the people and the work went with them. But Shepard was one of those who had helped shape the little town and his talent for humbug once again put a spotlight on Rhinelander, but now for a different reason. Now Rhinelander had its own mascot, the Hodag, and through it its own image; an image of pioneering spirit, of adventure and of cultural heritage. And thus it has remained. The town is “The Home of the Hodag” in the tourist pamphlets and the ugly beast has turned into a school district mascot. The Hodag is also the protector of the Hodag Country Festival; a yearly event that draws crowds to the community.

The Jackalope, the horned and whiskey-swinging rabbit, is probably the most recreated of all Fearsome Critters. According to New York Times the first Jackalope saw the light of day in 1932, in the hands of taxidermist Douglas Herring of Wyoming. His stuffed rabbits with added deer horns quickly became immortalized on postcards, and the concept proved very lucrative wherever it was adopted. President Ronald Reagan owned a Jackalope trophy that he proudly displayed at his California ranch. Naturally the trophy had an attached story about how Reagan himself bagged the critter. The town of Douglas, Wyoming, has proclaimed itself to be the Jackalope capital of the world, which can plainly be seen in the tourist agencies. Besides t-shirts, caps and postcards you can also purchase a Jackalope hunting license. But other states have borrowed from the legend and created their own versions. Also the hockey team Odessa Jackalopes has chosen the beast as their mascot.

There are actually pictures of horned rabbits from 17th and 18th century books on natural history. These probably depict animals with the viral disease *Shope papillomavirus*, which cause horn-like keratinous growths on rabbits. There are also examples of humans growing “horns” caused by this disease.

The fur-bearing trout can also be found in various forms as a trophy wall-mount. It can be seen in some museums, including The Royal Scottish Museum of Edinburgh. Again the legend may be based in some fact. *Saprolegnia*, or “cotton mold”, is a fungoid water mold that can attach itself to fish. This results in white or grayish fur-like growths, that will eventually kill its host if it turns aggressive. Fish stricken with cotton mold and washed ashore will no doubt appear to be covered with fur to observers not familiar with the fungus.

The legend of the fur-bearing trout is said to be originated by a Scottish immigrant who in the 1600s wrote home about the wonders he had witnessed in the New World, including the aforementioned trout. Maybe he had seen a fungus-stricken fish, maybe he just made it all up. In any case he was encouraged by his Scottish family to send a stuffed specimen of this very rare breed. The trout he eventually sent to Scotland was apparently a very evident fake. The one seen in The Royal Scottish Museum was submitted by a lady who bought the trophy in the US. She was convinced that this was a specimen of a real but very rare breed of fish and was consequently laughed out of court by the museum curators. She was so offended that she refused to claim her fish and the trophy was therefore put on display with similar curiosities, such as a stuffed mermaid.



One Fearsome Critter that seems to have been created with an economical potential in mind is the Gowrow. According to some sources there is a dragon-like monster from the native mythology of the Ozark Mountains that is the basis for this creature. A William Miller is said to have slain a Gowrow in 1897, after the monster had terrorized settlers for quite some time. According to legend the cadaver of the beast was sent off to the Smithsonian Institute, but was misplaced along the way and disappeared. There were still reports of a Gowrow in the Ozarks as late as the 1950s.

The Gowrow is said to make the earth shake when approaching and it makes a bellowing sound that has earned it its name. It is a formidable beast; huge, lizard-like and covered with spiky horns. There are certainly people who would pay to see such a monstrosity in the flesh and therefore there have also been people struggling to meet that demand. During the 1800s there were (probably in several places) a Gowrow on display in a carnival tent. When the attending audience had coughed up 50 cents each and sat down in front of a huge curtain, the show was suddenly interrupted by gunfire, screaming and panic. Someone would run into the tent and declare that the Gowrow had escaped, whereby everyone joined in the turmoil and headed for the exits.

In later years books and articles about Fearsome Critters have been quite scarce. It's a pity, for the stories about these strange creatures are indeed worth retelling; hence this book. I may not be as good a teller as the old boys of the lumberjack outback, but I'd like to do my part. Have we seen the last of the Fearsome Critters? Are we too adult and jaded to not be able to laugh at our own gullibility? I sure hope not.



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Something about the author.



Richard Svensson was born and lives in Sweden, where he works as an art editor for a local newspaper. In his rare spare time he writes, draws and makes masks and props for stage plays, TV shows and LARP role players. He also enjoys making amateur adventure films with his friends and tries to keep the noble art of stop-motion animation alive. He'd like to see the Loch Ness monster perform live before he dies.



